

Hello my fellow OA friends!

A very belated Happy New Year to you all – I hope 2015 is turning out to be a happy, healthy and, most importantly, abstinent year for you.

I saw in the New Year on the other side of the world in Orlando, USA, and my holiday experience was totally enriched by this wonderful Fellowship. Before I left Great Britain, I sent an email to the Central Florida Intergroup and within just a matter of hours, I had numerous offers of support from some very kind 'friends I hadn't met yet'.

We landed late on the afternoon of Friday, 19th December 2014 and by 8.30am the very next morning I was sitting in an OA meeting! Now that's what I call fellowship in action! Incidentally, I'd turned down the kind offer of being taken to a Friday evening meeting, as I realised that it wouldn't have gone down too well with my loved ones had I disappeared almost as soon as we arrived! In my eyes, that's where the actions I take in order to remain in recovery need to form a "bridge to normal living" [*Is there an alcoholic in your life? A.A.'s Message of Hope, 1976, p.18*].

I'm very grateful to the kind lady who picked me up and took me to meetings, took me shopping, lent me items to enable me to make my own meals on occasions and who even offered to act as our own personal tour guide around some of the theme parks! She insisted that she enjoyed it and was grateful to have the opportunity to do for me what others had so willingly done for her. And that's what it's all about, isn't it? Giving away what others have so freely given to me.

I never cease to be blown away by the love I receive in these rooms from people with whom I would probably have never otherwise come into contact if we didn't happen to share this disease, and for that I am eternally grateful.

Love in Fellowship

Lucy, SBS Editor
Newcastle-upon-Tyne

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We need YOU to submit your shares, stories, letters, artwork, illustrations and poetry.

Share with fellow OAers around Great Britain.

Do some fun service and keep our Fellowship thriving.

Email all submissions to
stepbystep@oagb.org.uk

OR, write to
**SBS c/o OAGB, 483 Green Lanes
London N13 4BS**

Submissions deadline for the Summer 2015 edition of SBS is Friday, 22nd May 2015. Topics:

Step Eight "Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all."

Step Nine "Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others."

or any topic/Step/Tradition/ Ask-It Basket question/Tool of your choice; review a favourite piece of OA-approved literature; or share your experience of an OA Event/Retreat/Workshop

Submissions sent to Step By Step are assumed to be intended for publication and may be subject to editing. All submissions become the property of OAGB for publication and copyright purposes. Submission does not guarantee publication. We do not publish stories that contain outside issues or that do not demonstrate recovery through the OA Programme. Please note your contribution may be held and published in a future edition of Step By Step.

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For more information on the Steps and Traditions, visit www.oagb.org.uk

Step Seven

"Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

The books have useful concepts about Steps Six and Seven, including recognising character defects as out-of-date coping mechanisms or sources of past or present pleasure. They point out that the changes in our lives caused by abandoning these defects are fear-inspiring. They redefine humility as the realistic appraisal and acceptance of our place and role in life. They encourage us to turn our back on humiliation and acknowledge our strengths as well as our weaknesses. Aye to all of that! These are all useful concepts that have helped me towards a manageable life, away from guilt and self-disgust and constantly crying to get people to rush in and take these feelings away from me.

But I still have character defects that haven't been removed! After 24 years of practising the OA Programme, why aren't I free of them? Compulsive over-talking, big-shot-ism, procrastination, inconsiderateness of others... I've prayed for their removal. On my knees. In writing. Via set prayers (*Step Seven prayer, Alcoholics Anonymous, Third Edition, 1976, p76*). In my own words (begging, pleading, bargaining, angry words; I've tried many approaches!). I've tried tricks to get rid of them: wearing a T-shirt with the logo 'Silence'; avoiding the tea room at work, putting myself up for jobs I hate that require me to act contrary to my defects (e.g. ringing people). Why don't these Steps work for me? What do I have to do? Lie prostrate in prayer, not just on my knees? Get my vocal chords cut out? Go to a country where I don't know the language and avoid English speakers? Go to a desert island?

Every now and then I go through an occasion when I could have practised one of these defects and I didn't; but on the next similar occasion I practise the defect double-strength. I can see little progress over the last 24 years. I won't say NO progress, but it seems as slow as the movement of tectonic plates; and unlike the Earth, I haven't got millions of years to wait for the mountains of my defects to be removed.

I give up sometimes. "This is pointless!" I think, writing in my Step Ten an occasion that's coming up on the following day when I KNOW I will practise my defects. But they cause me too much pain for me to be able to resign myself to their non-removal by giving up on Step Seven. There are liberal promises in the literature that they WILL be removed! Keep trying, then... Maybe it's like California (where OA was founded): earthquake country. The tectonic plates move past each other. Half of San Francisco will eventually end up in Oregon. Oregon and Washington wait 200 years or more then get a massive shift as metres of plate push down into the depths of the Earth. It's unstoppable. Now THAT's the sort of shift I want for my character defects off the map in one big jump (preferably without the 200-year wait)! But not all the faults in the Earth work like that. The 'creeping section' in California doesn't do big earthquakes, but if you build a straight wall across it then wait several years, your wall bends in the middle, and if you leave it long enough, it gets broken into two and the two broken ends get gradually further apart. Maybe the removal of my character defects is going like that: slow, VERY slow, but irreversible, just as inevitable as the big sudden shift accompanied by an earthquake. Keep "humbly asking", then...

Sheila, UK

Step Seven

This Step (along with Step Six) is often considered to be one of the forgotten Steps. For me, it was one of the most difficult. I simply could not get my head around the concept of humility, even though it was spelled out for me in the Step. *"...humility is simply an awareness of who we really are today and a willingness to become all we can be."* [The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, 2002, p60].

My view of humility originated with a literary character "ever so humble, sir"; a character who pretended to like and respect people while secretly plotting their downfall. This was a bit like me; however, I never quite got past the plotting stage and my plotting was most often done alone, and in the middle of food binges.

I once heard someone describe themselves as "wonderful and talented" and then go on to say that was humility. At the time, I thought it was arrogance, but it made me start to question exactly what humility meant to me and the description in the OA Twelve and Twelve is one of the best I have come across. I was always putting myself on "*some imagined ladder of worth*" [p60], constantly judging others and whether they were better or worse than me. It was exhausting and frustrating – I was never as thin or talented as I wanted to be. In order to fully take Step Seven (and in my experience this is not a one off, but a Step that I have to take whenever my character defects rise up) I need to let go of "*old attitudes which block humility, such as low self-esteem, status-seeking and self-righteousness.*" [p62] and see my true value and worth.

A good example of this for me relates to managers in the workplace. When I was a junior employee, I always felt self-righteous when a manager made a mistake that I could have predicted. This gave me the comfort of knowing that I was right and made me feel secure. As I have become a manager myself, I can't rely on rubbishing others to make myself feel better and I have to feel the pain of not being able to sort out everything that I would want to. I have to experience the low self-esteem of not being good enough and sometimes harbour the false belief that if I have 'this promotion, that car or that house', I will feel better about myself. Without Step Seven, I would be stuck in this place, on a treadmill of constantly trying to prove my worth.

By humbly accepting who I am and striving to do God's will, sometimes I will hurt, and sometimes I will feel I am truly worthless, but in moments of clarity, I realise that all I have to do is sit back and accept that I am good enough; that God loves me and is healing me; that I have worth and ability just by the fact that I exist, not by the fact that I do anything else; and that it is all right for me to say, 'No,' to things.

Last year I spent two weeks in intensive care hovering between life and death. The people who looked after me were strangers: they didn't know me at all. They just knew that my life was intrinsically worth something and sought to save it. For me, this was a turning point. I started to understand my innate value and worth and gain some inner peace. My belief is that Step Seven allows us to claim our space in the world exactly as we are and to discover our real purpose in life without the food as a crutch.

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"I can have an off day, but never a day off!"

Recovery is a journey, not a destination, so, as my sponsor would say, 'Watch this space!' ☺

Joanna C, Newcastle upon Tyne

Pity Pot Poem

I'm sitting on my pot fixated with what I have not got
The sky is grey, it could affect my day
If I am home or away, my thoughts get in the way
Things are not fair, why me, feeling bare
It is a 'not right' day, stay away, stay away
My tone is ratty, the volume high, eyes rolling and plenty of sigh
Nobody loves me, feeling beat ... I really need to eat.

Eat what? Nothing ever fills my empty pot
My bottom is sore, my connection poor
I listen and hear the voice of HP, the one always willing to help me
Standing up, changing position, just like that ... a mighty magician
Step Six has the principle of willing and I pick up that key 'cos it works for me
Looking at my part, this is disease thinking, negative and stinking
Serenity Prayer I say and repeat, taking away the feeling I need to eat
Fellowship contact, look at my eating plan, phone, write, helping another, all these things I can.

Talking with another my self-obsession lifts, my inverted pride starts to drift
I used to binge on food and can now binge on emotion; all habits can diminish with devotion
Keep it simple, easy does it, Steps, Traditions the design for life without strife
I have a choice to change nil or positively swallow the recovery pill
My God loves me in totality, helping me to just BE me
Forgive and face the real issues of the day, there is no other way

Gratitudes flow in and I thank God and now I accept I am an anonymous bod
No better or worse God can remove this curse
My face relaxes, my eyes start to shine, this Power is divine
From start to finish my pity pot event was short, showing me my willingness is priceless and cannot be bought
The sky is blue, I feel so blessed I really couldn't do it without you
My pot is clean and I no longer sit, well... if I do it's for a tiny bit
Experience, strength and hope I share with you all, I give it to God and "Have a ball!"

*Love, Suzi B xx
Northwest*

Tradition Two

"For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern."

Just what are "trusted servants"?

We read the Tradition every week in our meeting: "Our leaders are but trusted servants..." While attending a recent regional OA meeting, it became very clear to me just what that "trusted" bit means. Looking at the leaders of the meeting, watching them be sane, reasonable and wise for three days, I realised there are certain characteristics that enable me to trust them.

First, they are all abstinent, with a five-year current abstinence minimum. They prove to me that this Programme works in them, not that it *can* work, but that it *does* work. Having leaders who are abstinent today, and for many days leading up to today, means they are grounded in physical recovery.

Secondly, each "trusted" leader is working the Steps to the best of their ability – the proof: their continued abstinence. More proof: their sanity, maturity and humility. More proof: their willingness to apologise when they make a mistake or begin to take something too personally. More proof: their willingness to not be popular when they feel the next right thing might go against popular opinion.

Thirdly, each sane and abstinent leader is using the Twelve Steps outlined in the Big Book [*Alcoholics Anonymous*] as their plan for living. They are living examples that abstinence is the point of Overeaters Anonymous, just as sobriety is the point of Alcoholics Anonymous, and without that we have little of substance to offer the newcomer.

At my home meeting, when a member holding a service position breaks abstinence, s/he steps down from that responsibility. This is not punitive, merely respectful of the group and the Tradition to have "trusted" servants. There are jobs on the day that anyone can help with, e.g. setting up chairs or stacking them after the meeting, so there is always service available to everyone who wants to help.

Thank you to all those trusted servants – abstinent and working the Steps and living in recovery – for leading OA today.

Anonymous

Public Information Work

I was asked recently if I'd like to get involved in some Public Information (PI) work for OA. A controversial media character (K), has been filming a two-part documentary that was then aired early this year on a cable television network. The production company has followed K on her journey of putting on four stone and losing it and meeting people along the way who struggle with weight and food obsession. The National PI Subcommittee were contacted via OA member C (who did an amazing job of helping to organise everything) to ask if OA would allow K into one of our meetings.

People travelled from all over the country (Glasgow being the furthest!) to come together in Exeter and stage a filmed OA meeting that K could observe, followed by a question and answer (Q&A) session afterwards. The production company were great, reassuring everyone of anonymity, sending contracts beforehand so we would be assured of protecting identities by faces being blurred/pixelated and giving everyone the choice of having their voices changed. They also said if at any time we wanted to stop filming, they would stop, and that if there were any questions we were asked that we didn't feel comfortable answering, we needed only say "Pass," or, "No comment".

Personally I was in two minds about this. On the one hand, I jumped at the chance of letting people know about OA and carrying the message, but on the other, I was incredibly anxious about meeting K and potentially being goaded or drawn into controversy. Everyone involved was conscious of this and information was sent out beforehand on OA media guidelines and Traditions. We also met beforehand to make sure we were all clear on what we could/couldn't talk about and go over the meeting format, etc.

The staged meeting was held in a lovely community hall in Exeter and thanks to OA members T and H, we had professional OA stands, banners, posters and literature. There were about 15 OA members and we sat in a horse-shoe shape, with K at the top between two OA banners.

I was really nervous. I'd been practising in my head the last few days what I would say in two minutes and had got myself into a bit of a tizzy. In the end I decided that I would open my mouth and pray that my HP guide me in saying what needed to be said. As C opened the meeting, my hands shook and I questioned again whether this was the right thing to get involved with. T started with a five-minute lead share and her eyes sparkled as she spoke. She managed to convey in the short time she was given the pain of compulsive overeating and the amazing hope of recovery. By the time she had finished sharing, my heart beat had slowed and my hands were no longer shaking. Clockwise around the room, each person shared for two minutes and I have never experienced anything so profound and wonderful. As each person opened their mouth, what poured out was their truth: painful, beautiful, full of hope and recovery. By the time it came to me sharing, I felt peace and serenity and I was smiling inside.

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We closed the meeting by holding hands and saying the OA Promise all together and there was a tremendous sense of fellowship, of shared experience and shared hope and I felt right down to my bones that this was meant to be.

The Q&A session with K was next and instead of feeling panicky, I felt ready to take on the world but the onslaught of controversial questions didn't come! She was polite, inquisitive and friendly. She asked questions that any newcomer would ask and seemed to take a genuine interest in each of us. It was amazing. And what was most amazing was the strength of everyone there: feeling the fear and doing it anyway. Worrying, as I had done, and still believing some good would come out of it. Standing in the car park beforehand and saying the Step Three prayer together, feeling an overwhelming sense of fellowship, speaking our truths. We couldn't help but smile afterwards.

I don't know how the TV production company will edit the footage, how much of a mention OA will get or how many people might find out about us because of this. What I do know is that I'm not in control of the outcome, my HP is, and so I don't need to worry about it. I'm not an expert on OA or our Traditions, I'm not an old-timer or anyone important, I'm just a compulsive overeater working the Twelve Step programme of recovery in OA and sharing my experience, strength and hope wherever I can.

For anyone in two minds about doing some PI or getting involved in the National PI Subcommittee, I can only tell you my experience: there is nothing else like that feeling of accomplishment when you feel the fear and do it anyway!

*Love in fellowship
Sam D xx*

Sugar makes me unhappy

During my long, slow, subtle relapse of about two years, putting on 35lb (16kg) of weight that I had lost through being abstinent, I've been "sliding down the razor blade of life" to quote a brilliantly witty song.

Although my life was manageable and enjoyable - I was doing my job well, keeping my home and garden nice; seeing friends; sponsoring (though my sponsees knew I wasn't abstinent); enjoying both my physically active and physically inactive hobbies; doing service in my community; organising a workshop in my OA group; having fun socially; living a full life - in fact, I wasn't actually happy.

As far as food went, I would overeat to get mouth pleasure, so I looked on foods I was eating as a source of that pleasure. For example, sugar gives me pleasure. When I realised I was actually not happy, I thought of a new slogan for my life: 'Sugar makes me unhappy'. Using that, I've been off high-sugar foods for two weeks now, and the unhappiness is gone. Yippee!

Anonymous

Life as it is!

Seven years abstinent with an itch I want to scratch, pick and poke,
But this is serious and far from a joke.

Food thoughts have been infiltrating
Making life rather frustrating.

A thought is just that, feel it and stay sat
No jumping up for the kitchen door, the wounds are healing don't remake them
sore

My feelings are negative, draining and sad
Surely my behaviour is not all bad!

"I said, she said, I should have said, she should have said,"
Round and round like a washing machine but in my head

Perception, perspective, oh where are you now when needed?
Inside my head is an overgrown garden much in need of being weeded

If I want to eat, what is eating at me in every way?
It's the first thing I think of if I forget to let HP have the biggest say

Could it be family, friends, work, home or the community at large
That is making me think of devouring bread the size of a barge!

What is it that is not going my way, or how hurtful is what people are saying?
The thing and words are not too important 'cos they can go if I'm praying

Bored, lonely and a lot fed up
My eyes are looking like a deserted pup

This road of recovery makes me see beyond what seems to be
Helping my body, mind and spirit be the best they can be

I sit in the quiet, close eyes and say out loud The Serenity Prayer
Remembering meetings and feeling the strength of the Fellowship I share

My solar plexus is feeling warm and glowing
Negative Nora is packing and going

Positive Polly is back in the room and holding my hand
Picky Pippa and Fault-finding Fiona have gone to another land

My attitude is one of gratitude now, abstinence, HP, eating plan, the Steps too
They really help me in any situation and I believe they can help you

I cannot afford to forget what I am and the Power that is with me 24/7 365
Due to this Power much bigger than me I am generally happy in my skin and
glad to be alive

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This week I have had fat feelings which occasionally arise
If I lack humility this can be a surprise

My thinking can be warped and very self-centred
Helped only by the spiritual way of life that I have entered

By Stepping I am constantly moving
Life improves day by day and I'm mainly grooving!

My channel is open the sunlight flows in
If I desire to not overeat I go to meetings, listen and begin

Never alone we all use the phone
I am speaking today with a much nicer tone!

Love and thanks for all your part
I wish you abstinence and inner peace with all my heart

*Blessings galore
Suzi B x*

Step Two

"Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

Even on the days when I believe in my Higher Power (HP), I don't always have faith that he/she/it will take away my character defects, look after me or love me. Last night was a case in point: I wrote my Step Ten, handing over my forthcoming long overnight journey to HP, then went into town and waited for the long-distance coach into the city. My schedule included a $\frac{3}{4}$ -hour wait in the city for another coach to take me overnight to a distant city.

I and other passengers were at the stop in good time but the coach was late. As the $\frac{3}{4}$ -hour mark neared, at which I would miss my connection, I tried to 'hand over'. My experience with public transport is that things always work out so that I have a blessing to count, and rarely do I fail to reach my destination, thanks to HP working through the wonderful people who run these services.

Bang on $\frac{3}{4}$ hour the coach appeared. Wow! Was that an answer to my prayers? I am not sure my HP answers prayers of that type. Maybe it was just luck. My gratitude to HP was great, because I'd been spared the decision of whether to give up and go home. Being stuck in the city at 11pm if I missed my connection was a big scary thought. Now, though, I had to get on to the coach and live in suspense as to whether I would catch the connection.

It was this living in suspense that was the bit that showed lack of faith in my HP. As the coach made its way through the city lights, I saw on the face of every illuminated clock the minutes getting closer to the departure time of my connection. At two minutes to, the coach arrived at the stop. I grabbed my bag and ran for the departure stand across the street. I just made it! But when I sat in my seat and tried to prepare myself to sleep for the overnight journey, I found I was shaking much worse than could be explained by my 30-yard sprint. I had let so much tension build in my body with my 'will-it-won't-it'

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"Whatever you pay attention to grows"

agitation that it had to come out as shakiness when it was relieved. I needn't have done. Yes, I needed adrenalin for the sprint, but not THAT much! Something would have worked out if I had missed my connection. I don't know what, just as I don't know whether it was HP or chance that I caught it, but I know I would have got the strength from HP to do whatever it would have taken to cope. If only I had ACTED AS IF that was so, I would not have made myself a nervous wreck!

Sheila, UK

"Is he not a victim of the delusion that he can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if he only manages well?" [Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition, 1986, p61]

I was listening to a podcast yesterday that talked about ego and self-worth being diametrically opposed, like on a see-saw. When my self-worth is low, my ego rises up to overcompensate and this is when I'm most driven for validation; when I want people to give me attention/praise; and this is when I pick people apart; when I'm unforgiving and intolerant. It's as if by judging other people and pulling them down, then that is my vehicle for rising up. What tends to happen is that I isolate from others because I'm being judgemental and I end up being the person who feels bad about themselves dressed up to look like I feel good. Then I have the feeling of fakeness, of putting on a mask and being a façade of a human being and I'm petrified I'll be found out. I'm then fearful that people will see through the mask and realise I'm a horrible person.

The reverse is also true; as a result of making amends and helping other people, there are moments when my self-worth is high. When I'm good inside and my self-esteem/self-worth is high, my ego drops. When I'm good inside then I'm accepting and tolerant and patient. When I'm really ok then you're ok and I don't have to pick you apart or feel good at your expense. I don't need to buy new clothes to feel fleetingly better; I don't need to turn to food to give me comfort.

There's an old tribal story about a young warrior who goes to the wise, old medicine man of the tribe and says, "I don't understand what's going on in my life. Sometimes I feel good about myself and other times I don't and then I'm full of apprehension and fear. Sometimes I feel comfortable and I go with the flow and really feel like part of the tribe; other times I seem to be wrapped up in myself and I don't fit into the tribe at all. What is this? Why am I like this? It's as if there are two parts to me."

And the wise, old medicine man tells him, "Son, your life is like two dogs: one that represents self and fear and the other that represents love. Those two dogs are trapped in a sack and they are fighting to the death." The young warrior gasps, "Well, which one wins?" The wise old medicine man replies, "The one that wins is the one that you feed."

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I always went for self-gratification; I always chose to please myself, to try and "wrest satisfaction and happiness out of the world" by managing well. I always fed the wrong dog. It never would have occurred to me before OA that when I felt bad I should go and make amends or help someone else. If I feed my ego then my self-worth diminishes but if I take the action in the Big Book, that truly changes the way I feel about myself, then my ego is reduced and I have a sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

OA differs from a lot of self-help and therapy as therapists often want to teach you how to better manage your life. OA says, "Step away from your life. You've done enough, thank you very much. Leave your life alone. It's time to turn your life over to your HP. Go over there, work these Steps, make these amends, try to trust God, and let's see what happens." When I remove myself from the driver's seat; when I give up trying to direct the show; when I stop trying to control everything and everyone; when I clear up the wreckages of my past; trust my HP and help others; and I feed the right dog, then happiness and satisfaction flow in automatically.

Early on in recovery, I heard something that didn't make sense at the time. "One day, God is going to use your experience to help someone else." I have been divinely crafted to be of service to people like me, compulsive overeaters just like me. I can be of help to others too but I'm not as crafted to be of service to others as I am to compulsive overeaters. In light of this, my whole life makes sense: why I've been through all this; why I felt like that; why I struggled with that stuff. There is a usefulness that comes from reaching out to others, a rightness to it, which must surely be God's will for me. When I help others, I feel inside of myself the way I always imagined I'd feel if I had enough stuff, enough food, enough love, and enough material possessions. I am finally, in moments of helping others, happy and satisfied because I am fulfilling my primary purpose. I am right with myself and I am right with the universe.

Anonymous xx

'Coincidences?'

This morning I went to the hospital for some physiotherapy and when I came out there was a book sale. I usually judge books by their cover but one old book that had an awful cover caught my eye and I started reading it. There's a bit in the Big Book in the chapter 'We Agnostics' about electrons [p54] that I always gravitate to and the book I picked up at the hospital is about the interconnectedness of things. The first bit that I read is about how the world as we view it isn't real, how we see rocks as solid, still, inanimate objects but within a rock is a swirling, whirling, motion of atoms. The number of atoms necessary to cover a single speck of dust is some thousand million million – 1,000,000,000,000,000 (think angels dancing on the end of a pin).

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"Worry is a rocking chair that doesn't take me anywhere"

I watched a documentary a few years ago that explained quantum physics in very basic terms and it explained how no two atoms can have the same energy signature so that if I rub my hands together to heat them up, I change the energy properties of the atoms in my hands and in the air around me. Because no two atoms can be exactly the same, there are slight shifts in atoms elsewhere to ensure no two are the same. This means that every single atom in the entire universe is connected and in communication with each other. And there are atoms everywhere. All moving. Constantly communicating. It's like the old saying about a butterfly flapping its wings causing a hurricane across the other side of the world!

My point is that I don't believe in a religious God but that I do believe in the interconnectedness of the universe and maybe when it comes down to it, it's exactly the same thing. I wouldn't have picked up that grim-looking book in a million years had something inside of me not caused me to reach out. At a meeting last night I chose a random story from the new OA 'Brown Book' [*Overeaters Anonymous, Third Edition, 2014*] that I've never read before and the reading was about a recovered compulsive overeater with fibromyalgia, which is exactly what one of our new OA members at the meeting has. She got to hear it and relate to it because she was there.

If I look, there are 'coincidences' everywhere and the thing is, after a year in Programme, I've come to not believe they are coincidences: I think the Universe/God/Higher Power/Mother Earth/The Unknown (delete as appropriate) is helping us and guiding us and using each of us to carry a message to others.

*Sam D
Ilkeston, Derbyshire*

Willing to change

I have been locked in anorexia/bulimia, which despite being abstinent with food and being a recovering compulsive eater, has remained firmly within me and manifested itself with body image obsession. I have been searching for ways to get freedom around this as the mental obsession has been all consuming, preventing me even connecting to my body; sometimes allowing myself exactly what to eat; when to eat; distorting the perception of how my body actually looks and feels; chronic mirror checking and fat checking; stopping me from being present with others with myself and God (Step One). When I am in the disease, I am blocked from the sunlight of the spirit which is the total freedom the Programme promises; the complete safety held connected in God's love.

I went for a walk at lunchtime today and decided to listen to a Big Book study on speaker tapes that you can download onto smartphones. What jumped out for me today was listening to the 'spiritual experience' (Step Two) share they do on the Big Book. What they really talked about today was being willing to change (Step Six) and as I listened, I had tears in my eyes, as I knew I was drawing closer to the truth. If I want to be free, I have to be willing to have an entire psychic change – that is what a spiritual experience is described as in the Big Book, by letting go of *all* defects and having God remove these defects (Steps Six and Seven). However sometimes I don't even know how to change

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to be free as I'm so locked in the disease. So what do I do? I turn to God. God and the Programme are the only solution to my disease (Step Three).

As I listened to the share on a spiritual experience listed in Appendix II of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, I am suddenly out of the self-centred, self-obsessed fear of body image and the eating disorder and I'm smiling; I'm feeling connected to God; and I'm out of self. But I want more.

So then I see 'freedom from bondage of self' as another of their shares. Well, that is all I have wanted from recovery really and I've managed to achieve it on so many levels around different substances; relationships; food; but not the body image, and so I open the share and they are sharing about resentments and how we need to pray for another (as we find out on p67 during Step Four) to free the resentment. And then I have a click moment/a literal sudden spiritual experience whilst walking on a sunny Tuesday afternoon. I am resentful at my body! So what do I need to do? I need to pray for my poor body: I need to pray for tolerance, love, compassion, freedom for my body, serenity, and acceptance – everything I want (Step Ten)! And I feel intuitively (Step Eleven) as I am walking along that this is exactly the course of action to take. Suddenly a freedom and peace comes from within and I feel totally connected, smiling outwardly and inwardly.

And as I went back into work, I went into the toilet and became willing (Step Eight) and I made amends (Step Nine) to my body, right there and then. I said, "Body, I am so sorry for what I have put you through; I am sorry for abusing you; for not listening to you. From now on, I promise not to overfeed you or underfeed you but to listen to you and give you exactly what you need. I promise not to try and control my hunger or to push you beyond your limits through exercise or lack of rest. I promise to love and respect you and not to burden you with my selfish, self-seeking motives manifested by my pride, my vanity, my dishonesty and, most of all, my fear, which leads me to try and control everything about you.

And then I went and ate my lunch slowly and gently and I stopped when I was full, because sometimes my will wants me to control my portions and hunger but this is not God's will. I ask God to show me how to eat (Step Three) and I listen for my body to tell me what it needs. It is not for me to control: it's not my business. I need to leave that to God and it will all be taken care of (Step Three). And when I am spiritually well and in the Programme, I am able to connect to my body and do this. And so then I suddenly felt a burning desire to share this with my fellows who may or may not identify but nevertheless my duty is to carry this message to others and practice these principles in all my affairs (Step Twelve).

Right now I am not suddenly completely free of body obsession or the eating disorder, but I do know I am chipping away and on the right path. I am going to pray for the resentment of my poor body and with that hopefully my resentment will lift, along with my compulsion to try to control my body image; my obsession with getting fat, which sometimes leads to food obsession; my dishonesty, lack of trust and faith in God will dissipate; and I will be free. But as we know, I will need to continue to work this Programme every day of my life and maintain Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve daily to keep this disgusting killer disease at bay, one day at a time.

God bless you all. Thank you, God. Amen x

Emma C, London

Small meeting buddied by larger meeting

The simplicity of Fellowship has been in action in my area. One of our twelve meetings is small and has changed from weekly to once a month.

At an Intergroup (IG) meeting, the difficulties were tabled and HP took over. The IG representative from a meeting that has up to 26 members attending proposed that their meeting buddied and supported the small meeting. By group conscience the week after, members unanimously agreed to be of help.

Good use of Seventh Tradition has been exercised. We have supported the small meeting in time and money. A one-off travel expense was donated for the group rep to have the opportunity to attend IG and to assist with sharing experience, strength and hope and two members visited the small meeting. The visit was a humbling experience. We travelled together to keep costs down and chatted effortlessly. We were welcomed warmly and shared each of our journeys in recovery so far.

This type of service is priceless. Speaking for myself, pre recovery I would have been negative and seen a small floundering meeting as a sign it needed to fold; yet to the best of their ability, two core members have kept the meeting going. Members of the bigger meeting gave permission for their telephone numbers to be taken to the small meeting and outreach calls have been welcomed.

To have an opportunity to give back what I have been given was awesome and plans are underway to visit the March and April meetings. The small meeting has shown perseverance and hope, going to any lengths to share their difficulties. The unity of each meeting means the giving and receiving of Fellowship help.

Things can change with action and commitment. I am so proud to belong to a group of compulsive overeaters willing to give their time and money to help others, expecting nothing in return, yet receiving insurance for continued abstinence and progressive recovery. Collective HPs are awesome and results divine. For anyone considering Step Twelve work, the benefits are many and endless.

Love Suzi, NW

Interview with Linda C, OAGB Secretary/Board Member

1. What drew you to stand for the National Service Board?

Actually, I had just resigned after three years as Chair of Intergroup and was intending to take one year out then apply for the Board, but I heard there was a shortage of candidates and it didn't feel right for me not to step forward. I think it's important to mention that I didn't feel I had ambitions to be on the Board but I do want OA to continue and flourish and I don't think I can always expect others to do that work. I also have a lot of personal commitments at the moment that made it a bit harder, but they are positive things in my life that have come as a result of recovery, so it didn't seem right to not do service

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because of this. I also had to admit that I would need to come forward and try it on the basis that if it was indeed too much, I might need to step down for some time. I believe it's better to step forward and try it rather than assume I won't be able to cope.

2. What would you say to someone considering standing for the Board in future?

To go for it. I felt very proud to be standing up at Sheffield to be elected. My hope is that more and more people step forward and don't think that it's a job they can't do. I am now the secretary and still learning what my role is but feeling very supported and guided by the members with experience.

3. Would you like to go on to do service beyond NSB in future (or have you already)?

I would hope that it's something I can keep moving forward in, as I would do in any other area of my life. I treat my recovery with the same commitment as family or work. If I don't put the time and effort in and do it consistently, then I won't get out of it what I need or want.

4. What did you most enjoy about October's National Assembly?

I enjoy the whole experience. I even love the business side of it, which if I am honest, before I ever came to a National Assembly, I didn't even bother to read about. I realise today if I feel passionate about the Fellowship and want it to strengthen and grow, I need to be prepared to step forward and put extra work in that isn't just for my own benefit. I love the saying, "You have to give it away to keep it."

5. What brought you to OA originally?

I was 10 stone heavier than I am at the moment and had tried all diet clubs with success and then quickly followed by failure. I actually dieted my way up to morbid obesity. Then watching a family member recover and change before my eyes in another Fellowship, I decided to give OA a go. I haven't looked back since. I have been abstinent since that day eight years ago.

6. What are you most passionate about in the Fellowship/your recovery?

ABSTINENCE!!! I feel very strongly about it being the whole point of Overeaters Anonymous, regardless of what area of the illness you are in. Working towards a healthy body weight is important and so is maintaining it once you are there, in my opinion. When I arrived, I wanted to see that this Fellowship worked. That is only evident to newcomers based on how our bodies look and how we behave. However, one without the other does not have the same attraction. It needs to be both: not underweight and not overweight and not purging. I know that my life has changed dramatically since coming into recovery and I also know this is because of working the Steps and being abstinent. However, the Fellowship is about staying abstinent. It does not promise to fix broken relationships. Although this may be a result of abstinence, it's not our primary purpose.

SBS Succession Planning

After 4½ years of service on the Step By Step Subcommittee, we will be standing down following the next edition (Summer 2015) of SBS. Following a 'recruitment drive' at National Assembly we are delighted to inform you that we have two members keen to take on the roles of Planner/Email Responder and Copy Editor/Journalist; however, we are yet to 'fill my shoes' so to speak and are now desperately looking for members willing to take on what should really be the two roles of Editor and Designer. If we are unable to fill these positions then sadly SBS will once again cease to exist after the summer.

For your information the guidelines for volunteers assisting the Board on subcommittees such as SBS are as follows:

- OA membership
- Three months' abstinence
- Working the Steps
- An understanding of the Traditions
- Working with a sponsor

The key tasks currently involved in each of the vacancies are listed below, however, please bear in mind that these are subject to change following the group conscience of the new SBS subcommittee:

Editor:

- Monitoring the number of submissions and, if necessary, sending out a reminder about the submission deadline
- Writing the Editor's Column for each edition
- Proof-reading edited articles mainly in regards to potential Traditions' breaches
- Chairing and minuting of SBS meetings
- Typing up and uploading of minutes and putting together the agenda for future meetings
- Liaising with the Board Communications Officer re finalising the draft edition of SBS
- Attendance at OAGB IG Chairs meeting once a year

Designer: (good IT skills required)

- Compiling the draft edition following the submission review meeting
- Sourcing new quotes for edition and matching these to specific articles
- Carrying out amendments to draft edition following the final draft meeting

If you are passionate about SBS and are interested in either of the above roles then please drop us a line on stepbystep@oagb.org.uk. Personally speaking, it's been a lot of hard work, but incredibly rewarding and has enhanced my recovery no end. I can safely say I am not the person I was 4½ years ago!

*Lucy, SBS Editor
Newcastle-upon-Tyne*

Ask-It Basket Request

If you have a question about OA, send your question to stepbystep@oagb.org.uk with the header "SBS Ask-It Basket". Experienced OA members will answer your question, and it may also appear in the "Ask-It Basket" in Step By Step.

Calendar of Events

Workshops, conventions and other OA happenings...

See <http://www.oagb.org.uk/up-coming-events/>

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	CONTACT
Fri 15 th to Sun 17 th May 2015	Ilkley Retreat – “The Twelve Principles of Overeaters Anonymous”	The Briery Retreat Centre Ilkley West Yorkshire LS29 9BW	oanorthofenglandevents@hotmail.co.uk Sponsored by North of England Intergroup FULLY BOOKED (waiting list in place)
Fri 10 th to Sun 12 th July 2015	14th Annual OA Recovery Convention	The Hilton Birmingham Metropole Hotel NEC Birmingham B40 1PP	contact@hoeconvention.org.uk Sue 07952 289 266 www.hoeconvention.co.uk Hosted by Heart of England Intergroup
Fri 16 th to Sun 18 th Oct 2015	30 th Annual OA National Assembly and Convention	Exact venue tbc Farnborough Hampshire	Flyer to be distributed in the near future http://www.oagb.org.uk/nsb-payment/ Hosted by South Coast Intergroup Sponsored by OAGB

Publicise your OA event for free!

Let SBS know if your group or other service body is organising a workshop or other OA event that you'd like advertised on this page. (Just send an email to stepbystep@oagb.org.uk with details of the date, event, venue and a contact number and/or email address, stating which registered OA group or other service body is sponsoring this event.)

Any comments, suggestions or ideas for future editions?

Want to advertise a new group?

Send SBS an email at:

stepbystep@oagb.org.uk

(please don't simply reply to the OAGB emails)

*God, grant me the
serenity to accept the things
I cannot change,
courage to change the
things I can and wisdom
to know the difference.*